

THE STORY OF A MINISTER'S SON

An Autobiography

By

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First Writing -- To be revised and corrected

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DEDICATED TO THE
LARGE FLOCK OF BLACK
SHEEP KNOWN AS MINISTER'S
SONS--BY ONE OF THEM

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Chapter I

CONCEIVED IN SIN

I was placed in my cradle by the hand of a slave, a black saint from whom I first learned of God and eternity.

If environment is a force that shapes the soul and body of a child we should go back certainly nine months from the hour of birth to the hour of conception to weigh its power over a growing being. I was conceived in my mother's womb in the spring of 1863 while the earth was trembling with the shock of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. Certain it is that these forces shaped the development of my sub conscious life. For this period of our history has always held for me a supreme fascination, has shaped my studies and determined many things in my career.

If a sudden shock to a pregnant mother can cause a birth mark, how much more certain that the steady beat of a tropic sun, the brilliance of a Southern moon, the glory of sunrise and sunset will leave their marks.

I have often wondered at the mystery of the forces that shaped my unconscious being. The power that determined that my hair should be ~~kk~~ black the color of my eyes brown. That I should grow to be a man six feet three and a half inches tall. That I should be slender, not fat. That my heart should have a slow beat of 54 instead of the normal 72--so slow in fact that I got my insurance policy with difficulty. That my lungs should be strong bellows that easily throw off a cold. That my eyes should be clear and tireless. That my sense of smell should be dull. That my ears should be keen, my sense of touch sharp and sensitive, my taste of foods discriminating. That I should love the open spaces, of mountains, plains and sea and dream of them without ceasing even in the roar of the greatest city.

The young modern mother of the city is examined by a trained physician from the dawn of expectant motherhood. Her daily life is watched with care.

Some have been known to select the southern corner room of the hospital in which the baby is to be born eight months in advance.

My mother did not have these advantages at our plantation on the Arkansaw River in 1863 where I started earthward on my long journey. Yet she lacked nothing. Her daily attendant was a pious slave mother who loved her with deep personal tenderness. Yet this woman was a chattal slave. And according to the gospel of John Brown and William Loyd Garrison I was conceived in sin. For these men believed and taught that Negro Slavery in the South was the "sum of all villanies, the sin of all sins."

Was it?

True it was a survival of feudalism. //But was feudalism all ~~ev~~ evil? Certainly this patriarchal form of ~~the~~ civilization was a normal organic development of human society more than a thousand years in the making. ~~Which~~ Which is more than can be said of the manifest system of wage slavery which took it's place, and last but seventy five years before the collapso of 1930-33. Our nation is at present engaged in a life and death struggle to restore twenty million white people to the standard of comfort and security enjoyed by the three and a half Negro Slaves before the war. For the man or woman who lack food, shelter and clothes is lower than the beast of the field who has the natural right to take these where he finds them. No slave of the ~~old~~ old South ever lacked one of these essential needs of humanity. The Iron Law of Wages, established in place of chattal slavery, has proven itself merely a trick by which the masters of men have escaped all obligations to a slave. They now turn ~~h~~ him out to die, without clothes, without shelter, without food, without a doctor's care.

Is this progress?

My mother was the one real slave of the plantation ~~on~~ on which she lived. She came of a great breed of men whose ~~gen~~ genius created the American Republic. The daughter of a rich South Carolina planter, of the hill country of John C. Calhoun. She accepted the grave responsibility of the black people given to her as a dower with the deepest sense of duty. Hers was the endless task of ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of these people.

She saw to their proper housing ~~first~~ first. All were provided with ample log

cabins, each with a ^g big oepn fire place and beamed ceilings. ~~There~~ Their beds were of soft feathers, their coverings wool blankets and white counterpane. Their ~~beat~~ yards flamed through spring and summer with favorite flowers, and always swarmed with chickens and children.

A ~~garden~~ garden in the rear of the cabin provided fresh vegetables for the table. Watermell^lons and canteloupes they got from the fields. The thrifty ones always fattened two pigs for market and cultivated a cotton patch selling the products for their ~~own~~ own account.

At night they sang and danced to the tinkle of banjos. On Sundays they went to the same church with the master and in the evening listened to their own dusky preacher proclaim the gospel as he had received it.

In the fields they sang while they worked. In the leisure which was theirs between working hours, men made baskets and brooms, the women made peanut butter and fudge. These, with their surplus chickens and eggs, they sold to the white folks. And with the money bought small luxuries.

They lived in comfort always and in perfect security. And the houses in which they dwelt, with their feet in the soil and their heads lifted to sun and moon and star, were palaces compared to the crowded dens in which their grand children whelped and stabled in Northern cities, during the terror of 1930-33.

At the time my unconscious life began we were living on a rich farm ~~in~~ near little Rock. My father following the Western Treck, had moved from Carolina and settled ~~there~~. The Civil War was now entering ~~it~~ its final bloodiest ~~war~~ phase. The South in May had fought and won its great victory in the annihilation of General Hooker's army at Chancellorsville and suffered her greatest loss in the death of stonewall Jackson.

In the West Reverses had thrown Arkansas into the line of battle. ~~Farragut~~ Farragut, the naval genius contributed by the South to the Union Cause, had captured New Orleans and Memph^{is} and opened the river to its source, thus cutting the Confederacy in two. Grant had swept down the st^{re}eam in triumph and was laying siege to the last Southern stronghold on its banks at Vicksburg.

The State of Arkansas, thus isolated, was scheduled to early occupation by the

Union forces. Abraham Lincoln had issued in January the Proclamation of Emancipation declaring all slaves in the Confederate States to be free.

If he would save himself from financial ruin my father saw that he must return to his old home in North Carolina behind the wall of Lee's army. The journey would be long and dangerous. He must run the blockade of Farragut's gunboats to ~~run~~ cross the Mississippi River and swing far south with his cavalcade of covered wagons to avoid the swiftly advancing columns of Grant. He must move always through a no man's land between the two armies, a territory swarming now with jayhawkers, thieves, cutthroats and deserters from both sides. These desperadoes were living off the ~~country~~ country, robbing and murdering at will.

It was a doubtful and desperate undertaking ~~by the~~ but he believed it to be the only way he could save his wife's inheritance and the family from ruin. He was not an enthusiastic believer in slavery. He was a Baptist Minister, whose one great purpose in life was to preach the gospel. His wife's dower was in slaves and he regarded the care of her fortune as a sacred duty. The ~~war~~ war had not been fought by the North to free slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation just issued was an accident of the titanic conflict. Lincoln had declared in his inaugural that he had no intention to free slaves, and no power to do it if he so desired. He continually repeated his position in order to hold the border slave states, but was finally driven to write his edict by the desperate conditions of the war. When he issued the Proclamation of Emancipation, thousands of Northern soldiers threw down their arms and went home. The Middle West including Illinois went Copperhead and threatened a new secession.

But the deed was done. Its effects was surprising and disastrous but it could not be undone and the issue of the destruction of slavery was now in the lap of the God of Battle. ~~which~~

While my father had no illusions as to the ultimate end of chattal slavery, he did not believe in the justice of their being freed by an act of confiscation. The question of holding these slaves he had settled in the light of historical facts. The ~~new~~ Constitution of the United States ~~was~~ guaranteed his rights. Slavery was not a